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NEWARK MERCHANT RECEIVES \$15,000 FOR PARTICIPATING IN "FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM"

Robert Ballister, a Newark merchant, was presented with a check for \$15,000 for his participation in the Newark Economic Development Corporation's fourth Neighborhood Commercial Corridor Initiative, the "Facade Improvement Program."

In a special presentation in Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson's office, Ballister was the first merchant under the latest program to receive a reimbursement grant. Eligible applicants in the program can receive grants of up to \$3,000 per business once they have completed such improvements as new lighting and signage; storefront improvements, replacement of windows and landscaping. Target areas for the program are Springfield Avenue, Bergen Street and Sixteenth Avenue. Ballister's grant represented five separate grants for work done on his five storefronts.

Alfred Faiella, executive director of NEDC explained that the program is designed to provide an incentive for merchants and small businesses to engage in exterior rehabilitation activities which will have a visual impact in improving the physical characteristics of the commercial strips. "The idea is to have a consistent facade along the strips and that program participants will be encouraged to employ a design scheme which will focus on common facade treatments, uniform signage and the installation of new exterior lighting," Faiella stated.

Jake Griffin, president of the Springfield Avenue Merchants Association discussed how much of the redevelopment activity along Springfield Avenue was based upon recommendations made by Candeub, Fleissig and Associates, which was commissioned by Newark's Office of Planning and Grantsmanship to conduct a market feasibility study. As a result of their study which concluded that improvements of the physical characteristics of businesses along the main corridors would increase commercial

activity, the City allocated \$200,000 from its eighth year Community Development Block Grant for implementation of the "Facade Improvement Program."

Mayor Gibson noted that "In order for Newark neighborhoods to continue their stride toward rejuvenation, it is absolutely necessary to address the problems along our inner city commercial corridors. I do not think that the negative image of these areas is justified because they have remained active. In fact, this particular area (Springfield Avenue and 10th Street vicinity) is probably growing as fast as any area in the city. I strongly believe that the Facade Improvement Program will enable merchants and small businesses to improve their delivery of goods and services to community residents and will provide a financial incentive for businesses to undertake improvements that have been deferred."

Ballister, Inc., a family-owned business that has been in the same location on Springfield Avenue between Blum and Holland Streets since 1937, has expanded from the original Marty's Meat Market to include five buildings and a parking lot. They now operate two meat markets, two produce markets, a discount variety store and a soon-to-open fish market. Ballister explained that while other businesses had left the area, "our business was prosperous. People will always need food. There is opportunity here, and with the assistance from the government, we can put up a new store and pick up the business that will be coming into the area." Ballister has also renovated and rented apartments above two of the stores and is considering a future laundromat.

Griffin echoed Ballister's optimism by stating that "more businesses are coming into the area above 7th Street than are leaving and Springfield Avenue is coming back to life. As for the fear of crime, the merchants are getting together to protect themselves and to alert criminals that they are not to come into this area."

Gibson stated that the reason this presentation was being made in a special ceremony was to alert merchants in the target areas that the program was in existence and to encourage them to participate.

The target areas are: Bergen Street from Lyons to Custer Avenues; Springfield Avenue from High Street to South Orange Avenue, from Beacon Street to Hayes Street, from Hunterdon Street to Fairmount Avenue, from South 6th Street to South 11th Street and from So. 16th Street to South 19th Street; and Sixteenth Avenue, from So. 11th Street to South 14th Street, and from South 17th Street to the City line. Faiella explained that the target areas were chosen because they generate the highest concentration of commercial activity.

Merchants who are interested in participating in the Facade Improvement Program must submit an application to the Office of Planning and Grantsmanship at 32 Green Street, Newark; provide three separate cost estimates from a certified contractor for the planned improvements; provide a copy of the deed (if the owner) or a minimum three-year lease (if the tenant); and verify that the property is current in its real estate taxes, and water and sewer charges.

Prior to the implementation of this program NEDC coordinated three other programs on commercial strips in Newark. On South Orange Avenue the Merchant Association received over \$100,000 for improvements. The Central Avenue Community Business Owners Association was awarded \$50,000 in 1981 to undertake capital improvements which included both interior and exterior renovations in 15 businesses between South 6th and South 12th Streets. The Roseville-Orange Merchant Association was awarded \$50,000 in 1981 for a capital improvement program in which 23 merchants participated. Another 32 merchants have been targeted for a second grant that was awarded in 1982.

Faiella stated that based on the success of these previous programs, three more commercial strips are targeted for future improvements: Central Avenue, Broadway and Ferry Street.